

HISTORYMOBILE TEACHER'S GUIDE

THE LIFE AND LEGEND OF DANIEL BOONE

OVERVIEW

The Life and Legend of Daniel Boone is a multimedia exhibit about one of Kentucky's most popular heroes. A video and exhibit panels with images, text, and a timeline provide biographical details about Boone and his world and explore the reasons he has achieved legendary status. Artifacts and models of a frontier station and farm supply details about Native Americans and frontier domestic and military life.

Students visit the exhibit in class-size groups. A 30-minute program conducted by a Historymobile staff member includes an overview of the exhibit, the 12-minute film, and time to explore the displays.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Topics

- Kentucky history
- Westward movement
- Biography

Core Content Connections

- Historical Perspective: The growth of democracy and geographic expansion were significant in American history (SS-M-5.2.3)
- Historical Perspective: Primary sources, secondary sources, artifacts, and time lines are essential tools in the study and interpretation of history (SS-M-5.1.2)

BACKGROUND

Introduction

Why is Daniel Boone the central hero of early Kentucky? Before 1784, Boone was a hunter struggling to pay his debts and keep his family alive. Yet, he came to represent the spirit of America itself. Writers, illustrators, and television producers contributed to an evolving image of Boone as common man, noble savage, wild backwoodsman, and force of civilization.

The Wild Backwoodsman

John Filson's 1784 "autobiography" of Boone introduced him as a nature lover who questioned the value of civilization. In 1786, John Trumbull published a radically edited copy of Filson's work

that portrayed Boone as a hunter, pathfinder, marksman, and Indian fighter. Late-nineteenth-century dime novels exaggerated this image, to the delight of readers who yearned for action and adventure.

Hunter & Trapper

Boone was an expert hunter and trapper who sought an income from deer pelts and beaver furs for much of his life. Initially dominated by the French, the fur trade lured British colonials westward, eventually contributing to the French and Indian War. The victorious British forbade eastern settlers to trap west of the mountains, but the promise of wealth caused many to ignore this regulation. Daniel Boone was one of many "long hunters" who trapped their way across Kentucky for months at a time in search of hides to sell on the eastern market.

Frontiersman & Pathfinder

Boone's long hunts made him an expert woodsman. He visited Florida to the south, Detroit to the north, at least as far west as Kansas City, and possibly as far as the Yellowstone country. Called "The Columbus of the Woods," he possessed knowledge that made him invaluable to land speculators. His ability to find his way in the wilderness has won Boone the respect of generations.

Indian Fighter

Nineteenth-century biographers and dime novelists portrayed Boone as a savage warrior. Yet, a contemporary wrote that Boone had "very little of the war spirit," and Boone himself told his son that in his whole life, he was sure of having killed only one Indian. Growing up in frontier Pennsylvania and North Carolina, he had numerous opportunities to observe many tribes. He respected Indians and was even adopted by the Shawnee Chief Blackfish after he was captured in 1778. During his life, he endured accusations of cowardice when he was reluctant to attack the Indians; yet, he gained a reputation after death as a determined Indian fighter.

Settler & Surveyor

Boone's image as "The Prince of Pioneers" contrasts sharply with his identity as a natural man. Instead of retreating from civilization, Boone the settler promoted it. In fact, Boone did dabble in some of the occupations associated with the westward expansion of "civilization." He tried his hand at surveying but

frequently failed to complete the steps necessary to ensure legal title. He made repeated efforts to acquire land but eventually found his claims challenged in court. Like settlers, he was ultimately defeated by a complicated legal system that brought disappointment to many and great wealth to few. He died owning 300 acres and little else.

Farmer & Family Man

Most settlers farmed their land, but Daniel Boone relied on hunting for his income. He spent long periods of time away from home, avoided farming whenever possible, and left child-rearing to his wife Rebecca. Yet he was devoted to and proud of his family. In his defense, he hunted to provide for his family. He died peacefully at age 85, surrounded by family members.

BEFORE THE HISTORYMOBILE ARRIVES

Determine a focus for student exploration of the exhibit. For example,

- Look for information about some of the issues of westward expansion: the impact of the fur trade, the complex nature of Euroamerican/Indian relations, the promises and perils of land speculation. In what ways did Daniel Boone participate in this arenas?
- Search the exhibit for clues to Daniel Boone's contributions to Kentucky's history and image. Which of his activities had the most impact on the state's development? Which influenced national perceptions of Kentucky? Why do Kentuckians proudly maintain that Boone's bones are buried in Frankfort?
- Cull details about aspects of Boone's life from the exhibit timeline. Which of Boone's roles predominates—hunter, explorer, Indian fighter, surveyor, land speculator, farmer? Explore the ways primary sources illustrate Boone's evolution as a hero. Look for images and artifacts that idealize or exaggerate Boone's personality and achievements. How do they compare with the biographical details on the timeline?

To make the most of their time in the exhibit, students may want to select one aspect to explore in depth. Or consider dividing the class into groups and assigning topics to explore.

Before viewing the exhibit, ask students what they know about Daniel Boone, his role in American westward expansion, and his evolution as a hero. Make a note of their responses.

IN THE EXHIBIT

If you have selected a focus for student exploration, tell the Historymobile staff member, so he can help students find related information, images, and artifacts.

A teacher must always be present with students in the exhibit. We rely on teachers to make sure students behave well during their visit, and we reserve the right to ask disruptive students or classes to leave.

EXHIBIT ETIQUETTE

- Show respect for the Historymobile staff member and classmates by not talking during the introduction and video
- Do not use recording devices, cameras, or laser-pointers inside the exhibit

BACK IN THE CLASSROOM

Find out what the students have learned by conducting a class discussion or by having groups report back. Compare what the students relate after seeing the exhibit to the information they identified before the visit.

RESOURCES

Useful biographical works on Daniel Boone include:

- John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer* (New York, 1993)
- John Filson, *The Adventures of Colonel Daniel Boon* (1784) online on the *Town Crier* website, <http://earlyamerican.com/lives/boone/index.htm>
- Michael A. Lofaro, *The Life and Adventures of Daniel Boone* (Lexington, Ky., 1978)

Recent videos about Boone include:

- Arts and Entertainment, *Biography: Daniel Boone* (50 minutes)

- History Channel, *Time Machine: Boone and Crockett, The Hunter Heroes* (2001, 100 minutes)

Recent books about frontier Kentucky include:

- Craig Friend, ed., *The Buzzel about Kentuck: Settling the Promised Land* (Lexington, Ky., 1998)
- James H. Howard, *Shawnee! The Ceremonialism of a Native Indian Tribe and Its Cultural Background* (Athens, Oh., 1981)
- “Kentucky before 1820” in Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington, 1997)
- Elizabeth Perkins, *Border Life: Experience and Memory in the Revolutionary Ohio Valley* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998)

Living history programs that explore the frontier include:

- The Kentucky Humanities Council’s Chautauqua series featuring presentations by costumed characters who portray famous Kentuckians. Current characters include Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton. For details call (859) 257-5932, or visit the Council’s website at www.kyhumanities.org
- Special events at Fort Boonesborough State Park, such as the “Muster of the Boonesborough Militia,” the “Middle Ground 18th Century Native American Festival,” and the “Reenactment of the Siege of Boonesborough of 1778.” For details call (859) 527-3131 or view the park’s website at www.state.ky.us/agencies/parks

ASSESSMENT

Please help us evaluate the effectiveness of the program by completing and returning the evaluation form.